

Unitarian Universalist Friends of the J. Paul Taylor Center
Answers to 19 questions about the
Fine Dining Experience Project
FAQs

1. What are the J. Paul Taylor Fine Dining Experiences?

The Unitarian Universalist Church of Las Cruces hosts a series of dinners at the Taylor Center as part of a social program for the Center's clients. The dinners are held for 8-10 Center clients and an equal number of church members, making the total dinner party about 16-20 people.

The purpose of these dinners is to give the Center clients an opportunity to interact with members of the wider community in a unique and pleasurable way while instilling a sense of personal self-worth. In addition, we hope to foster mid- to long-term relationships with members of the community and boys at the center.

Each supper has a planned menu consisting of at least three courses plus beverages. Meals are usually planned around a theme, for example, Greek, Thai, Mexican, deep-South, etc. These are sit-down dinners at cloth-covered, formally set dinner tables. We use nice china and flatware and try to set each table with flowers. Whenever possible, we like to include background dinner music in the program.

Our goal is to provide food that is acceptable to the clients but substantially different from the food they receive every day. To that end, we work cooperatively with the Center's nutritionist to develop meals that will be exciting and different for the clients but also acceptable to them.

2. Who is in charge of the Dining Experiences?

All projects conducted at the J. Paul Taylor Center under the auspices of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Las Cruces are done so under the guidance and oversight of the Unitarian Universalist Friends of the J. Paul Taylor Center (UUFJPTC). This group is a subcommittee of the Social Action Committee. Dinners are planned and directed by the Dining Coordinator.

2005 contacts:

Social Action Committee chair: Jane Asche, 532-8087

UUFJPTC co-chairs: Jane Asche and Lyn Pearson, 522-1934

Dining Coordinator: Haney Pearson, 522-1934

3. How many JPT Fine Dining dinners do we conduct?

We conduct four (4) dinners a year.

4. When are the dinners held?

Generally, the 2nd or 3rd Saturday of February, May, August, and November. The months are fixed, but the date is somewhat flexible to accommodate the Center's schedule. The date is fixed about a month before the dinner takes place.

5. What time do the dinners start and how long do they last?

The church dinner party leaves for the Center between 4 and 4:15 pm. This allows us time to unload the dishes, linens and food and begin setting up for the dinner. We leave the center between 7 and 8 pm. Time is flexible to allow dinner conversations to come to a graceful conclusion.

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6. Who cooks and serves the food, sets up for the dinners and cleans up the dishes and so on?

Cooking: Usually, those who attend the dinners prepare or otherwise provide all of the food. Occasionally, the UUFJPTC committee receives donations of food from people who are not going to attend the meal. Each person who attends is asked to provide something for the dinner: food, flowers, drinks.

Setting up: The clients chosen to attend the dinner help church members set up tables and chairs, lay linens and set places.

Serving: Church members serve the food to ensure even distribution and reduce the number of people walking around in the small dining room.

Cleaning up: Church members help clear the tables but the Center clients wash all of the dishes and serving utensils and pack them in their boxes based on each box's enclosed inventory form. A church member retrieves the packed boxes either the Sunday or Monday after the dinner.

7. Does it cost anything to participate?

The only cost to you is for the food, drinks or flowers that you provide plus your time and energy. We recognize that entrees can be expensive and the UUFJPTC can offer, upon request, a reimbursement for the costs associated with preparing entrees.

8. Can anyone attend the dinners?

All adults are welcome although space at each dinner is limited to a maximum of nine church members. You will have to complete a background clearance authorization for the Center before you attend the dinner.

9. How do I sign up to attend a dinner?

Contact the Social Action Committee chair, the co-chairs of the UUFJPTC or the Dining Coordinator (Who is in charge of the Dining Experiences?). You can sign up for a specific dinner, if there are still openings, or you can be put onto the waiting list for dinner openings.

10. Who is in charge of planning menus and shopping lists?

The Dining Coordinator who will conduct two (2) meetings with the group selected for the dining experience. The group will develop the menu and assign food/flower responsibilities.

11. When does dinner planning start?

Planning starts about six (6) weeks before the next scheduled dinner. Planning is not terribly complicated, but we like to be sure there is time for everyone to meet, develop a menu, and assign food/flower responsibilities well in advance of the actual dining date.

12. How do I get to the J. Paul Taylor Center for a dinner?

You can drive out to the center yourself or carpool with another person who will attend the dinner. Be assured, we will make sure you have a way out and back. The Center is located about

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15 miles west of town off I-10. Take the airport exit and turn left at the top of the ramp. Make a right onto the frontage road by the gas station and drive a mile or so until you see a power transformer station on your left. The Center entrance is just past the station and not very obvious, although there is a sign. CAUTION: be sure to make a right turn onto the frontage road; don't accidentally turn into the I-10 off ramp, which is also on the right.

13. What type of food do we have at the dinners?

We like to serve foods that the clients will like, although we try to stay away from things they are served at the Center on a regular basis; i.e., institutional food. Foods need to hold well during transport. Casseroles are great as are stews and soups. Things served over rice or noodles work well. The clients love all sorts of bread.

Recommended foods:

Appetizers

Interesting finger foods; including things like fresh fruits, vegetables and dips, shrimp, spicy or sweet and sour meatballs, etc.

Entrees

Typical entrees at the center are Mexican foods, baked or BBQ'd chicken, chopped ham loaf, meat loaf, and other typical institutional food.

The clients do not care for fish (although we suspect they don't have access to good fish) and asked to have meat loaf removed from the Center's menus. We were told that they don't like ham at all, but the Center's nutritionist later explained that the only ham they get is chopped and preformed into loafs or patty-like servings. She and the Director think the clients would like quality ham such as a spiral, honey-basted ham [indeed, they do].

Some suggested entrees:

- Good-quality honey-baked ham
- Pot roast
- Brisket
- Pork chops
- Tuna casserole (even though they don't really care for fish)
- Chicken and dumplings
- Beef and dumplings
- Spaghetti with meatballs, (they normally get spaghetti with ground meat so meatballs would be greatly appreciated)
- Fettuccini Alfredo
- Manicotti
- Calzone
- Chinese food
- Steak

Soups

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Specifically mentioned were broccoli and cheese and potato and cheese, cheese apparently being greatly appreciated. This does not preclude other good soups but be aware that they get a lot of chicken noodle and chicken rice soup.

Salads

The clients like salads of all types

Vegetables

NO SPINACH. Take this with a grain of salt – they will eat spinach in a salad and would probably tolerate it in lasagna. They just don't want the overcooked, slimy stuff.

Deserts

Anything. Ice cream is considered a treat and they particularly like cheesecake.

Beverages

Lemonade

Sodas are considered a real treat

Flavored bottled water

Coffee in limited amounts, for example, after dinner with desert

Fruit juices

Hot teas: caffeinated and herbal

Iced tea

NOTE: Hot foods prepared outside the Center must be re-heated to at least 120°. We use a steam table provided by the Center to accomplish this. It does not accommodate plastics or Tupperware type products. Stick with Pyrex or metal containers, such as disposable aluminum pans.

14. Can I make a dish that contains alcohol, for example, a beer stew or a beef dish made with wine?

No! Nor should you use alcohol-flavored extracts such as rum, sherry or brandy extract. This is not an area of flexibility. Most Center clients are being treated for substance abuse and alcohol or alcohol-flavored extracts can trigger a relapse. Using vanilla, almond, lemon, or other flavors of extracts is ok. While these extracts are made with an alcohol base, the amount of alcohol when diluted in a large amount of food is considered harmless. We must leave seafood Newberg's, cherries jubilee and rum balls off the menu.

15. How are clients chosen to attend the dinners?

The Center Director and the Director of Mental Health, along with other personnel who interact with the clients on a daily basis, use the dinners as a reward for good behavior and academic or other personal accomplishments. Therefore, you may see the same client at more than one dinner. A spot at the table is considered a real treat by the clients and we have been told that behavior markedly improves a month or so before the dinners.

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16. Is security or privacy a concern?

Yes. The J. Paul Taylor Center is a secure facility and takes great care to protect personnel, clients, and visitors. Although clients at this center are considered low to medium risk and some even work outside the Center occasionally, we must follow certain security guidelines at all times. Therefore, church members attending the dinners should be aware of the following:

1. You will be required to sign an authorization for a background check, so have it notarized and submitted to the Center well in advance of attending the dinner. You can get the form notarized at your bank (usually free) or there is a notary at the Center (call in advance).
2. The following must be left at the guard station before entering the Center for dinner:
 - a. Pens, pencils
 - b. Keys
 - c. Pager, cell phone
 - d. I.D., such as credit cards and licenses
 - e. Sharp objects such as knives, screwdrivers, scissors
 - f. Wallets, purses, money

Client privacy is also a great concern. Legally, outside of the dining room, you are not permitted to disclose or discuss any client information that is considered “personally identifying,” that is, any information you could give someone else that could enable him or her to trace that information back to a specific individual at the center:

- Their full name
- Their crime, if you become privy to that information
- Their sentence
- Health issues
- Family situation or any family information

This restriction is mandated by the HEALTH INSURANCE PORTABILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY ACT OF 1996. Although the act specifically addresses health information privacy, its application has been broadened in many government agencies to include the protection of all personally identifiable information.

17. What types of things should I talk about with the clients?

- Keep conversation general and if pressed for further contact information, give the church as a contact point.
- Talk about where clients are from, places where they have lived or visited, their hobbies, sports, music, future expectations, and thoughts about careers or continuing education.
- Talk about yourself, your kids, where you went to school, your career, hobbies, and interests; anything that does not specifically identify where you live or work.

If you are ever asked for assistance, such as telephoning relatives, taking things in or out of the facility, requests for gifts, money or other items (this has never happened to date):

Answer, “No, I’m not allowed to do that,”

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“The Director says we’re not allowed to do that,” or if they ask for a gift, money or other items,

“I’m not allowed to give you anything but I’ll let the Director know that you need/would like <whatever>.”

Avoid giving clients the following information about yourself or members of your family:

- Addresses
- Phone numbers
- Employer and/or place of work
- Email address

Avoid these subjects:

- Why the client is at the center
- Family or parental matters (please remember that some of the clients have witnessed horrendous family violence or come from extremely dysfunctional families.

18. What should I wear to dinner at the Taylor Center?

Men: Men: slacks and polo shirts are fine; suits and ties are not recommended as they are viewed as symbols of intimidating authority.

Women: Dresses or skirts of appropriate length and modesty or slacks with shirts, sweaters, etc.

No shorts, short skirts, T-shirts or sweats.

19. Are there other UUFJPTC Projects in which I can participate?

There certainly are more projects or *you* can develop a new project if you think it would be good for the clients. Please contact one of the co-chairs of the UUFJPTC who can help you decide which project you would like to work on or help you design and obtain approval for a new project.